

JEANNE RAINER Q&A



Jeanne Rainer

SAMUEL CLAESSION

Gorgeous brunette Jeanne Rejaunier (known onscreen as Jeanne Rainer) is remembered by audiences for her nationally syndicated television commercial for Coca-Cola where she utters the word "delicious." But being a spokesmodel for such an iconic brand was only the beginning of her onscreen achievements. She had recently finished her undergraduate studies at Vassar College and was attending the University of California, Los Angeles, when she—in an abrupt change—started doing commercials. Her starring roles in *The Naked Road* (1959) and *The Touch of Flesh* (1960) won critical acclaim and led to appearances on *The Jackie Gleason Show*, *McHale's Navy*, *Mister Ed*, *Combat!*, *Dr. Kildare*, *Run for Your Life*, *Burke's Law*, *The Dating Game*, and *Border Patrol*. It was after her last film, *I Sailed to Tahiti* with an All Girl Crew (1969), that she started writing novels. Her first was *The Beauty Trap*, which became a bestseller. She has since continued to write several other novels, while penning articles with magazines like *Life*, *Playboy* and *National Geographic*. As Jeanne Rejaunier, she recently directed a documentary titled *The Spirit of '56* and has various other projects in the works.

Samuel Claesson: You were an academic who attended one of the greatest colleges in the country. What on earth prompted you to pursue acting?

Jeanne Rainer: It happened while I was in college. I initially wanted to be a columnist, but one of my professors discouraged it saying that I wouldn't get far—her exact words were that there were "a lot of fish in a small pond"—and suggested that I become a playwright instead. I agreed and enrolled in some drama courses, and before I knew it, I was doing a screen test with Efrem Zimbalist Jr., at Warner Bros.

SC: Whose idea was it to change your surname?

Jeanne Rainer: I auditioned for the role of Phuong in *The Quiet American* [1958]. Joseph Mankiewicz, who directed the film, made it seem like I was guaranteed the role as long as I changed my name to Rainer because Rejaunier was difficult to pronounce. I changed it, which I later regret-

ted partly because I wasn't cast anyway.

SC: How were you cast in *The Naked Road*?

Jeanne Rainer: I was dining with some friends at the Copacabana when a woman named Beverly with the Dale Garrick Agency asked me to star in this low-budget film. It was edgy for its era, but didn't get much fanfare. He [Dale] was a marvelous agent, though, and helped me get an audition for *Where the Boys Are* [1960], but the director wanted someone more experienced.

SC: Where did you go from there?

Jeanne Rainer: I finished a starring role in *The Touch of Flesh* and left New York to do some work in Italy. I was fluent in Italian, French, and Spanish and was able to use that to get steady work in films and commercials overseas. *I Love, You Love* [1961] was one that I was proud of. It sold a lot of tickets before the producers pulled it from theaters after authorities censored several racy scenes.

SC: How did you prepare for some of these complex roles?

Jeanne Rainer: I'd learn as I progressed. I wanted to study with Lee Strasberg because he was renowned in the industry and helped create stars like Marilyn Monroe, but whenever I telephoned his office, the secretary would say that there weren't any openings. A friend suggested that I study with a great actor named Frank Corsaro, and he helped me perfect my technique. I later studied acting with Martin Landau and singing with Burt Knapp.

SC: I read that you were under contract with the infamous womanizer Martin Ransohoff.

Jeanne Rainer: Yes. I returned from Italy and signed with him because he said that he had plans to turn me into a star. He didn't use me for anything, though, and I was idle for several months. It was nice to get paid while doing nothing, but it slowed my career. He promised me the starring role in *The Wheeler Dealers* [1963], but gave it to Lee Remick instead. I got out of the contract and spent a few years with the William Morris Agency, who put me in several episodes of *Dr. Kildare*, among other things.

SC: Was there a role that you pursued, but didn't get?



The Touch of Flesh (1960).



The Naked Road (1959)

Jeanne Rainer: I did several auditions for *The Big Valley*. I really wanted that, but they cast Linda Evans instead. I never figured out why, but she was several years younger than me which could've been a factor. I was in my 30s at that point. *The Sandpiper* [1965] was one of several films that I was considered for, but for one reason or another wasn't cast.

SC: How about a role that you were of-

Jeanne Rainer and Ted Marshall in *The Touch of Flesh* (1960).



ferred, but rejected?

Jeanne Rainer: That's a sad story. I was offered the starring role in *The Blob* [1958], but I turned them down and did summer stock instead. I still kick myself for doing that and I can't explain why I did it. I didn't think it'd be the cult classic it became.

SC: You've written several novels since your retirement from acting and you've even delved into filmmaking.

Jeanne Rainer: I just finished a novel that I'll be publishing this year, and I have another that I'm writing. I recommend to readers who want a lot of insider stuff read *Hollywood Sauna Confidential*. It's an in-depth account of events witnessed by me at some of Hollywood's nightclubs and parties. As far as acting goes, I don't have an agent and I live in Florida so it'd be difficult to do auditions. If anyone reaches out to me and wants to cast me in something, I'd certainly consider it.

Jeanne Rainer in *The Naked Road* (1959)

